DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 789 CS 202 854

AUTHOR Wright, Donald K.
TITLE Magazines and Their Importance as a Major Agricultural News Source in Rural America.
SPONS AGENCY Wyoming Univ., Laramie. Coll. of Arts and Sciences.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (College Park, Maryland, August 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Agriculture; *Information Sources; Media Research; *News Media; Periodicals; Post Secondary Education; *Rural Farm Residents; Television; *Use Studies
IDENTIFIERS Wyoming

ABSTRACT

Telephone interviews were conducted with 112 residents of three rural Wyoming counties to determine sources of general and agricultural news and patterns of media use. Results indicated that farm and ranch news is gained from all facets of the mass media, but that magazines are used as a source more than is any other medium. Magazine usage was highest in the more rural areas of Wyoming; magazines were also listed as the source most people would want to keep if they could have only one source of farm and ranch news. Television was the major source of general news and was also rated as the source most would want to keep if they could only have one source of general news. Although television was rated as the most believable general news source, magazines were rated more highly than is usual in research of this nature. (Author/AA)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED128789

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Magazines and Their Importance as a Major Agricultural News Source in Rural America

Donald K. Wright
School of Communication
The University of Texas
Austin, Texas 78712

A PAPER
PRESENTED TO
THE MAGAZINE DIVISION
ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND
AUGUST 2, 1976

OS 202 854

MAGAZINES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE AS A MAJOR AGRICULTURAL NEWS SOURCE IN RURAL AMERICA

DONALD K. WRIGHT
School of Communication
The University of Texas

In American mass communication, where quality often has been sacrificed for quantity, the power of the advertising dollar has caused rural society to be ignored in favor of the more lucrative urban communities. And, since most media research is designed to measure audience size rather than content quality, rarely, if ever, is a detailed examination made of the mass communication reading, listening and viewing behavior of inhabitants of rural America.

Some communication research has explored the mass media's effect on rural societies, but most of these studies, although conducted by Americans, have concentrated on countries other than the United States. We know plenty about media use patterns in rural Africa, but have a void of knowledge about the situation in the sparsely populated areas of America.

The purpose of this study was to establish an understanding of the sources of general news and agricultural

---

Research for this paper was made possible by a grant from the College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Wyoming.

information the residents of rural America have, and how they use these media. When pre-test results indicated that the magazines were apparently used more in these rural areas than elsewhere, use of this particular news source was examined in greater detail.

Since American mass communication usually serves the economic interests first and society's interests later, mass media usually are more interested in metropolitan areas than rural communities. The media consumer, however, is also faced with a wider selection of news channels in the larger cities. Someone in Minneapolis, for example, can turn the television dial to four networks plus an independent station, can receive home delivery of, or at lease choose a newspaper from, the four Twin Cities dailies, can purchase a weekly newspaper or two and also can receive magazines through the mail. One might assume that this urban dweller will find less time to read the magazines, considering all the other news media available in the city, than the individual who lives in Sheep Rock, Wyoming, where you can receive only one television network, read a daily newspaper if you don't object to having it mailed to you a day late, and receive a radio station or two when the weather conditions permit it.

One other factor encouraged the author to conduct research on this topic. That is the 23-years which have passed since Axinn's classic study about the communication habits of American farmers,[1] and the feeling that it is about time research in this area be updated.

METHODOLOGY

The study examined responses of residents of three rural Wyoming counties regarding the sources they use for general news and agricultural information. Subjects for the study were selected at random from membership lists of the Wyoming Farm Bureau.

The counties used were selected in a purposive manner. It was decided to use Natrona, Albany and Crook counties because all three have different amounts of news media availability. Natrona county in east-central Wyoming includes Casper, the state's largest city, and accordingly a television station, a daily newspaper and four commercial radio stations. Albany county in south-east Wyoming includes Laramie, the third largest city in the state and no television station, a daily newspaper and two commercial radio stations. Crook county, located in remote north-east Wyoming, lacks a city larger than 2,000, has neither a radio nor a television station and is without a daily newspaper although a weekly newspaper is published at Sundance, the largest city in the county.

Most residents of Natrona and Albany counties can subscribe to cable television and receive Casper, Cheyenne and Denver stations. Most Crook county residents can get television only from a Rapid City, South Dakota, station, but some are able to receive television from Casper. As one subject said, "TV reception was good only when the wind

was blowing in the right direction."

Consequently Natrona county was considered, for this study's purposes, to represent an area of High Media Availability (High-MA), Albany county was classified as an area of Medium Media Availability (Medium-MA) and Crook county was listed as an area of Low Media Availability (Low-MA).

An interview schedule questionnaire was designed and telephone conversations were conducted with 112 respondents, 102 of whom were involved, one way or another, in some aspect of agriculture——i.e., farming, ranching, etc.

The questionnaire was patterned, in part, after the Roper studies,[2] with certain adaptations made in attempts to curb criticism for this study's method since parts of the Roper methodology have been excoriated by communication educators in recent years. For example, Carter and Greenberg have raised serious doubts about the effectiveness of the Roper methodology,[3] as have Clarke and Ruggles whose own research has found that television is much less preferred as the chief information channel than Roper claims.[4] The fact that Roper's research is funded by broadcast interests and that he always finds television America's number one news source also has raised doubts in some circles.

Care was taken to make certain subjects understood the researcher was discussing the media as news sources. It has been contended that Roper's question, ". . .I'd like to ask you where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today——from newspapers or radio or

teleyision or magazines or from talking to other people or from where?", is not specific enough. Critics claim that those who watch television mainly for entertainment will list it as a news source. In particular some wonder about the Roper claim that Americans would elect to keep television if they could continue to have only one source for news. In the study at hand it was emphasized that the broadcast media were to be considered in their news capacities only and frequently those listing television or radio as the most believable medium, or as the medium they would keep if they could have only one, were asked if entertainment programs had a factor in their naming an electronic medium.

RESULTS

This study was conducted in two stages. First the subjects were asked specific questions about general news, the ". . .what's going on in the world today. . ." kind of information. Later they were asked specific questions about their sources for communication about agricultural topics. Since the most significant finding in terms of a magazine division research paper is related to the agricultural sources, those results will be examined first. Other findings will be detailed later.

Agricultural News Sources. To begin with all subjects were asked to provide a list of their sources for agricultural news. Magazines were listed as a source by 84.3 percent of the subjects well above the other media as seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1

SOURCES USED FOR AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

Source	*Percent Using High-MA (n=33)	Medium-MA (n=35)	Low-MA (n=34)	Total (n=102)
Magazines	78.8	82.6	91.2	84.3
Newspapers	63.6	54.3	29.4	49.0
Television	72.7	48.6	8.8	43.1
Radio	84.8	60.0	55.9	65.7

*Because individuals use more than one source, the total exceeds 100 percent.

Magazines were especially used as a source for farm and ranch news in the most remote areas which often coincided with those parts of Wyoming where television reception was poor or just non existent. In the High-MA area, radio was used more frequently than magazines, but this was the only county

TABLE 2

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "SUPPOSE YOU COULD HAVE ONLY ONE ...(news media)...AS A SOURCE OF FARM AND RANCH NEWS, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU MOST WANT TO KEEP?"

Sources	Percentage High-MA (n=33)	Medium=MA (n=35)	Low-MA (n=34)	Total (n=102)
Magazines	27.3	40.0	41.2	36.3
Newspapers	18.2	8.6	2.9	9.9
Television	30.3	28.6	35.2	31.4
Radio	15.2	20.0	14.7	17.6
Don't know	9.1	2.9	5.9	4.9

where magazines were not used more than any other news medium as a source of farm and ranch news. The lack of availability of television in the Low-MA area did not have too significant of an effect on television's overall rating in this category. TV's combined average for the High and Medium-MA areas would still place it below radio, although in the case of those two counties television was listed more frequently than newspapers.

Next subjects were asked which mass media they would choose if they could have only one between newspapers, radio, television or magazines as a source of farm and ranch news and information. As Table 2 indicates magazines held a slight edge in this category, but television was a very close second. Almost five percent of the subjects were unable to respond to the question because they just were not certain. One interesting result in this tabulation is the high rating of magazines in

TABLE 3

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "IF YOU RECEIVED CONFLICTING OR DIFFERENT REPORTS OF THE SAME FARM OR RANCH NEWS STORY FROM NEWSPAPERS, RADIO, TELEVISION AND MAGAZINES, WHICH OF THE FOUR VERSIONS WOULD YOU BE MOST INCLINED TO BELIEVE..."

Sources	Percentage			
	High-MA (n=33)	Medium-MA (n=35)	Low-MA (n=34)	Total (n=102)
Magazines	21.2	22.9	38.2	27.4
Newspapers	12.1	14.3	8.8	11.8
Television	27.3	28.6	20.6	25.5
Radio	6.1	2.9	2.9	3.9
Don't know	33.3	31.4	29.4	31.4

the Medium-MA area, but some respondents explained that part of the reason might be that the daily newspaper in this area runs most of its agricultural news copy directly from releases of the county farm bureau and most interested farmers and ranchers have already heard this information on the radio before it appears in the newspaper.

Mention should be made of the residents of the Low-MA area who listed television on Table 2 even though their present reception is poor or worse. Although controls were inserted in the research design to check for subjects answering TV on this question mainly because of television's potential as an entertainment medium, it is possible some Crook county residents presumed that having a good television station for farm and ranch news would also give them a good television station for other types of programing.

Magazines were also found to be the most believable for agricultural information. These results, shown in Table 3, however, indicate that television was listed as the most believable farm and ranch news source in two of the three counties studied. Perhaps the low availability of television in the Low-MA area prompted residents there to believe more in magazines not because they considered them the best source but because they could not get television and considered the magazines better than newspapers or radio. A large number of subjects, 31.4 percent, answered "don't know" to this question.

The specialized nature of magazines was cited often as the reason many farmers and ranchers considered magazines more valuable than any other medium and as a justification for

the high believability factor rating awarded magazines. Several subjects discussed, at some length, the fact that magazines were both valuable and believable because, ". . . the magazines know what they're talking about." Some of the farmers and ranchers think that agricultural magazine writers know much more about farming and ranching than the individuals writing or reporting this type of news in newspapers, radio or television. Naturally, many agricultural broadcasts are reported on radio and television by the young and inexperienced broadcast journalists who frequent most of Wyoming's broadcast news rooms.

The believability factor, and magazine's status in the case at hand, offers some implications for future research. Magazines appear to be much more powerful in the diffusion of an agricultural idea than newspapers, radio or television. For example, some subjects said that they often became aware of a new idea in the farm and ranch business from radio, newspapers or television, but that they would wait and see what the agricultural magazines reported about this idea before taking action on the concept.

Perhaps Lionberger's idea of the diffusion model is worth mentioning here. Developed on the basis of extensive research, including a number of U.S. Department of Agriculture studies, this thesis contends that acceptance of communication goes through these five stages: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption with the news media having their greatest impact, and usefulness, in creating awareness.[5] It could be that magazines, in this Wyoming study at least, play a strong

role in the interest stage as well. One item Lionberger and others have mentioned about the diffusion process is that the communication media are important in creating awareness but that the media's importance decreases and the role of interpersonal communication increases as one progresses from one stage to another. With the sparsely populated areas surveyed in this present study, it is possible that the lack of immediate neighbors prompts some of these rural farmers and ranchers to use agricultural magazines in lieu of one-to-one communication one might find in dairy farming or some aspect of agriculture where those involved in farming and ranching tend to live closer together than most do in Wyoming.

Subjects were also asked which of the four mass media they would be least inclined to believe if they received conflicting or different reports of the same farm and ranch news from newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Most pointed out that this was probably impossible, but said they would likely be least inclined to believe radio. Many said magazines would be believed because they take more time to produce and afford the opportunity to check out details more than other media.

In an earlier study conducted by the author in California it was found that farmers and ranchers often use radio and television mainly for weather reports.[6] Weather was not as much a factor for agricultural purposes in Wyoming as it was in California and this found subjects in the present study using broadcasting media much less.

While some praised magazines for their specific detail, some criticized other media for the lack of it. For example, radio and television came under fire for not getting into more depth on agricultural issues, and some criticized the times at which farm and ranch information was broadcast. Usually the agricultural information was presented very early in the morning on radio——often before most farmers and ranchers were awake——or during the noon hour, and at times such as early Sunday morning on television. Listening and viewing habits of most farmers and ranchers revealed that the noon hour radio broadcasts were the only programs which had the possibility of attracting a large audience.

However when asked if they would care to have more agricultural information presented on television in the prime-time evening hours in lieu of regular entertainment programing, the majority said "no" and explained that they would just as soon watch the entertainment and get their farm and ranch news from the magazines they subscribed to.

General News Sources. Magazines did not fare as well in this category. Although respondents thought magazines were fine for farm and ranch news they listed all other media as being more significant than magazines in terms of sources of general news and information, i.e., "news about what's going on in the world today."

Television was listed as the major source of general news with 45.5% saying they preferred TV to any other medium in this category. Radio was second at 27.7% with newspapers next at 21.4% and magazines a distant 5.4%. Newspapers were

classified as the major news source in the High-MA area at 38.8% as compared to a 33.3% ranking for television in that county.

Television was the most believable general news source in all counties with a 28.5% average overall. The majority, 36.6%, answered "don't know" to this believability factor question. Radio was much lower in believability here than in other such studies and magazines, although third in the running behind television and newspapers rated stronger here than in most studies of this nature. In the High-MA area magazines were considered more believable than newspapers. The bias of news magazines such as Time and Newsweek was often listed as the reason subjects would be hesitant to believe magazines more than other media. Newspapers were listed as the least believable news source overall due mainly to a strong inclination not to believe some of the content of the Casper (High-MA) and Laramie (Medium-MA) daily newspapers.

When asked which news medium subjects would most want to keep if they could continue to have only one, the majority answered television at a very high 47.2%. Despite the strong ranking of magazines as a farm and ranch news source this medium received the lowest score, 7.1% on this question.

Subjects provided a number of comments and suggestions about the mass media in general. The rural residents, and especially those from the Low-MA area, complained about poor television service. There was a feeling that they should be able to receive television and that the government should see

to it that television is made available, perhaps via a federally funded cable program. Those who said most about the lack of availability of television were the Crook county subjects who can receive only the Rapid City, South Dakota, station. They wanted Wyoming news and information from a Wyoming station and expressed these thoughts and opinions to the interviewers.

SUMMARY

This study of residents of rural areas of three Wyoming counties finds a distinct difference in how magazines are perceived as a source of farm and ranch news as compared to their perception as a source of general news and information..

Results indicate that agricultural news is gained from all facets of the mass media, but that magazines are used as a source more often than any other medium. Out of 102 subjects, 84.3% said they used magazines as a source for farm and ranch news compared to a 65.7% use of television, a 49.0% use of newspapers and a 43.1% use of radio.

The majority interviewed said they would select magazines if they could have only one source for farm and ranch news. Television was a close second here, and TV was without much doubt the source subjects would keep for general news and information if they could have only one.

Magazines also were found to be the most believable source for agricultural news, and television was judged as the most believable source for general news and information

Magazines were used most in the more rural areas of the state, and it appeared that the specialized nature of

of magazines was the major reason why many farmers and ranchers considered magazines more valuable than any other medium.

Although television was listed as the major source of general news——i.e., "what's going on in the world today..;" magazines were found to be used more and to be more believable in this study than in other research investigating the use of various news media.

FOOTNOTES

[1]George N. Axinn, "Communication Habits of Delaware Farmers," Journalism Quarterley, 30:1 (1953), pp. 74-75.

[2]"Trends in Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media, 1959-1974," A Report by the Roper Organization, Inc. (New York: Television Information Office, 1975).

[3]Richard F. Carter and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which Do You Believe? Journalism Quarterley, 42:1 (1965), pp. 29-34.

[4]Peter Clarke and Lee Ruggles, "Preferences Among News Media For Coverage of Public Affairs," Journalism Quarterley, 47:3, (1970), pp. 464-471.

[5]Herbert F. Lionberger, Adoption of New Ideas and Practices (Ames, Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1960), pp. 31-32.

[6]Donald K. Wright, "A Survey and Evaluation of Agricultural News Resource Utilization," (mimeographed), A paper prepared at California State University, Fresno, May, 1971.